KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT USING STUDENT FEEDBACK: A STUDY OF ONLINE STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES ON VIRTUAL TEAMS

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Abstract

Introducing group projects in online courses provides an excellent learning laboratory for students to experience what it is like to work on virtual teams. This qualitative study leverages a knowledge base containing feedback captured in a university learning management system from a population of thirty-four students in an online M.B.A. project management course over three semesters to examine the lived experience of students assigned to virtual work teams. Anonymous student discussions about their successes and challenges while collaborating on virtual teams to deliver a final research paper are reviewed. A grounded theory is proposed and best practices provided for instructors interested in including virtual team projects in their own online courses.

Problem Statement, Purpose and Research Question

Problem Statement

Since delivering online courses is challenging instructors may be hesitant to introduce the additional complexity of administering team projects, removing an opportunity for students to experience working on virtual teams.

Purpose and Research Question

Purpose: To help online instructors conduct student projects using virtual teams. Student feedback during such projects informed a grounded theory and best practices for effective project initiation.

Students Were Asked This Question: ***Relate what you have learned about the special demands of project managers and the cultural dimension with your experience in coming together as a team for the team research paper over the first two modules (Note: 1 module = 1 week). What have you learned the most? Why?***

Main Arguments

Research Method

The primary researcher conducted a qualitative analysis that explored the lived experience of students who engaged in a virtual team project in an online project management course.

Participant Sample, Duration, Assignment

Thirty-four (34) students participated over three (3) eight week semesters of an online project management course. Students were assigned to teams with the goal of delivering a term paper at the end of the semester.

Data Analysis

A knowledge base of data captured in a university learning management system (LMS) was coded for anonymity and analyzed. This analysis surfaced and refined themes from initial open codes, to axial codes, to a grounded theory and best practices for effective virtual project delivery.

Open Codes

Initial analysis resulted in 166 open codes.

Axial Codes

Table 1 shows these 166 open codes grouped by frequency into three axial codes: The **Central Phenomenon**, comprised of communication, accountability and schedule concerns, **Critical Success Factors** and **Coaching Points**. Open codes were grouped by occurrence. The number of student concerns about communication outstripped all others by a wide margin.

Table 1. Qualitative Coding Analysis.

	Open Code	Tally	
Data Cluster 1	Communication	31	*The Central Phenomenon*
	Accountability	16	
	Schedules	12	
Data Cluster 2	Emergent Leadership	9	*Critical Success Factors*
	Collaboration	8	
	Priorities	9	
	Appreciation	7	
	Geographic Distribution	7	
	Goal Setting	7	
	Student Profiles	7	
	Assignment	6	
	Support	6	
	Technical Issues	6	
	Hesitation	5	
	Online vs. On Campus	4	
	Strategy	5	
Data Cluster 3	Input	4	*Coaching Points*
	Motivation	4	
	Commitment	3	
	Challenges	2	
	Lack of Authority	2	
	Negotiation	2	
	Coordination	1	
	Culture	1	
	Expectations	1	
	Lack of Familiarity	1	
	Total Open Codes	***166***	

Reference

Lohle M. & Terrell, S. (2016). Knowledge management using student feedback: A study of online students' lived experience on virtual teams. *Issues in Information Systems.* Volume 17, Issue 4, pp. 260 – 265.

Conclusion

A Theoretical Model Emerges

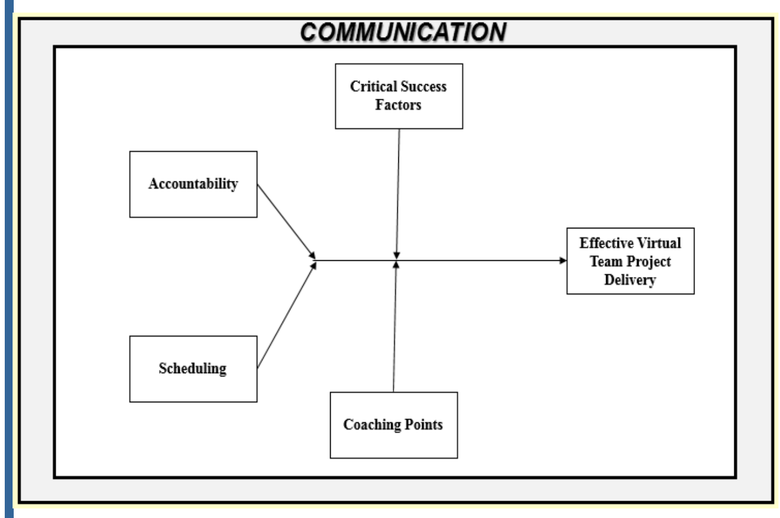

Figure 1: A Grounded Theoretical Model for Student Project Delivery on Virtual Teams.

Communication bounds the model since effective communication is critical. Then, since the goal is to achieve effective project delivery via virtual student teams this becomes the dependent variable while accountability and scheduling, the two other codes most often cited as predictors of success, become the model's two independent variables. Critical success factors and coaching points both become moderating variables.

Best Practices for Online Instructors

For Students' Communication Concerns

- Establish multiple avenues for communication.
- Use tools that provide visual cues.
- Actively and consistently engage students.

For Students' Accountability Concerns

- Offer to join student team meetings.
- Establish evaluation criteria that foster team accountability.
- Urge escalation about underperforming teammates.

For Students' Scheduling Concerns

- Convey the impact of not promptly addressing scheduling issues.
- Review the critical success factors and coaching points.
- Assign student teams before project initiation.